coming to Mrs. Wilding's one day shortly.

The William Northbridges declined Mr. Austin's kind invitation with great promptness, but Buxton, who is a F. R. G. S., and who thought that he himself knew something of Central Asian matters, accepted with alacrity. Mrs. Buxton would also come.

Mr. and Mrs. Revell have lived in London for years, although they are Americans. Charles Edward did not know them, so the rules of his game allowed him to ask them. Yet his conscience troubled him a little when he thought that because they knew the same set of people in New York that he did, the difficulties of conversation with them would be trifling. And when Mrs. Revell wrote to say that she had known her host's mother and thought she must have trotted him upon her knee in his early youth, Charles Edward, to whom this information was wholly unexpected, had a moment when he felt that he had behaved, to Singer at least, like an utter cad. But he overcame these pangs of remorse and ordered his dinner.

Charles Edward's plan of campaign involved more expense than is usual, even at a smart London restaurant. He took a private sitting-room next his private dining-room, and impressed upon the waiter in attendance before dinner the necessity of announcing the names of arrivals with great distinctness.

Singer came first. He had been told an hour and fifteen minutes in advance of the time appointed in the notes of invitation. It is as well to cage your lion before you admit visitors to your menagerie. Beside which, the host of the evening hoped that interest in Eastern Turkestan would at once overpower all other feelings in his guests, especially the vice of curiosity.

"Well, Austin, I support you think you're going to bring it off. Do you really expect a dinner party of strangers?"

Could one trust to Singer's tact and resource? In spite of the honors at graduation, Charles Edward's knowledge of history was not great; still he thought he could remember that Napoleon had kept the secret of his plans to himself.

"No," he answered; "I gave it up, old chap; it was too risky. These are people I do know. I found out that I had met Lady Emscott and had forgotten it. Funny, isn't it?"

The Buxtons were announced.

"It is good of you to come, Mrs. Buxton, since I knew your husband so slightly. But Mr. Singer insisted on my venturing to ask Mr. Buxton. How are you, Buxton? Have you been speaking again before the Geographical Society since the time I met you? That must have been over a year ago; let's see—"

"The lecture on the abandoned salt mines, wasn't it, in July?" said Buxton.

"Yes."

"I forgot who brought you."

"Oh, what's his name—I have a confoundedly bad memory—you know, the chap who thinks he knows something about the region himself."

"You mean Hertwich," said Buxton with a snort.

"Yes, Hertwich."

"Is he coming to-night?"

"Well, no." Charles Edward beamed. "You see, Singer didn't seem even to have heard of him, and I thought if I could get you—" He introduced Singer, and Mrs. Wilding was announced.

"I am in great luck to get you, Mrs. Wilding," was the greeting she received.

"Yes, you are," she admitted. "I had to manage it, I can tell you. I was engaged to some cousins of mine for to-night. But if Mr. Singer is to burst upon London—"

"You would like to arrange that the sunrise should take place in Chester Street."

"Exactly, Mr. Austin. Do you know, I had a hard time trying to remember where I met you? It is good for the soul, they say, so I out with the truth."

"I can quite understand. You meet so many people, and I never was especially worth remembering."

"I thought at first it must have been at your embassy."

"No, I never dined there," replied Charles Edward.

"Ah, then it was Mrs. Sackville's. I thought so."

"And you forgot!" The speaker endeavored to put a mildly sentimental note into his voice.

"Don't reproach me. You forgave me in the beginning. Now fetch me Mr. Singer."

An introduction followed. Fortunately Mrs. Wilding already knew the Buxtons. She had collected the explorer once some years ago, and he had occupied for an afternoon the place in the Chester Street drawing-room to which she now destined Singer.

Next came the Revells, and their host, to his shame be it said, almost welcomed the feeling of security which they gave him. The arrival of the Emscott party interrupted Mrs. Revell's flow of anecdote concerning Charles Edward's childhood. Charles Edward, inwardly agitated, thought outwardly calm enough, greeted their guests, and prayed that dinner would be announced at once.

"I am seating people a little unconventionally," he explained to Lady Emscott, who smiled vaguely in reply, "You ought to be at my right of course. But I know you will want to be next to Mr. Singer and so, if I am to keep husbands and wives and fathers and daughters apart, I can't have you next me. It isn't rudeness."

Charles Edward had worked the problem out by making many charts of the dinner-table on the Berkeley's best notepaper. If it is worth any one's while to follow his example, it can easily be proved whether or not Mrs. Buxton had to sit at his right; and at his left, Lady Angela, flanked by Buxton. The host noted with satisfaction that the Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society seemed a fairly dull dog. Beside, he would want to talk to Singer, who sat at his left, just beyond Mrs. Revell.

Before they went in to dinner, Lady Emscott got a moment with her husband.

"Frederick," she said, "I never saw that young man."

"Which, my dear?"

"Our host."

"You knew him at Monte Carlo," explained Lord Emscott, with patient weariness.

"Certainly I didn't."

"My dear Caroline, we know your memory."

"I'm perfectly positive."

"Then I'm sure he's all right. It's absurd to suppose that a perfect stranger would ask us to dine."

"He's an American."

"He's a gentleman, Caroline. I can tell by the look of him that he would be in Helena Frampton's train."

"Helena is what you call omnivorous; but really, Frederick, it doesn't follow that every young man who is a gentleman is also one of her young men."

"Oh," said Lord Emscott, "give Helena a chance—"

Dinner was announced.

Dinners are very much like dinners the world over. The points at the table where Charles Edward and Singer were seated are the only ones which require watching. Austin had discussed two books, three plays and the comparatively healthfulness of the air of Hampstead and the Regent's Park with Mrs. Buxton before he turned to Lady Angela. He meant that every one, Lady Emscott especially, should see that it was almost a sacrifice he had made in having Lady Angela next him. But he trusted that he could speedily remove any such impression from the mind of that young woman herself. It would serve to end to record their conversation. They got on well together, because, as the later events proved, they were destined to get on well. And Charles Edward kept the conversation so in hand that only once did it journey toward the Riviera and reach Monte Carlo.

"What do you think of Mrs. Frampton's looks?" inquired Angela.

"That," replied her host, "depends very much on what you happen individually to think of hair that color.

"I think perhaps it was nicer when it was a brighter red. You liked her immensely, I expect. All men do."

"Oh, well—"

"Mother is too funny taking care of Helena. You know what she is like. She gets so confused with Helena's attendant swains. She had great difficulty in remembering you."

"I should hate to say anything against your mother's memory."

"That sounds as if she were a historical character." Lady Angela laughed, and Charles Edward was again safely across the ice. Indeed, he was now flushed with victory. It was his moment of pride, and it came before a fall in the conversational vigor of his guests when he and Lady Angela both heard Singer.

The explorer had become expansive under the influence of pleasant surroundings.

"He is so amusing," he confided to Lady Emscott, deserting Asian wilds for the moment, and taking up their host as a topic. "He had a most extraordinary idea for to-night. Of course he didn't carry it out when he found he could get you people. He told me he would get together a party composed of people he had never met before." Singer explained in somewhat greater detail the humor of the original idea. Charles Edward cursed Napoleon.

Charles Edward does not hesitate to use the most hackneyed of phrases, and asserts that "no pen could describe" the way in which a chilling suspicion crept slowly over the company. The conversation became general after a short, but to the unhappy host, bloodcurdling pause. Without daring to watch any one, he could feel the interchange of confidences. For one moment he relied on Mrs. Revell to stem the tide. She knew who he was. No; she only knew who he said he was! Through the intermediation of Mrs. Wilding, much reached his lordship's ear. At first he smiled rather scornfully, but after listening a little longer to the lady's murmurings he sent a glance at Charles Edward that brought that youth's eyes up from his plate as an electric shock might have done. He left Mrs. Buxton to struggle for her right-hand neighbor's attention as best she might, and turned to Lady Angela.

"Well?" inquired the young woman.

"Yes, it's so. Are you very angry?"

"Yes, I am." This she said very gravely. Then, with a sudden laugh, "But it's so ridiculous."

"That was the idea. I hoped it would be amusing."

"My father hasn't your sense of humor. Didn't you face the fact in the beginning that if you were found out we should be angry?"

"Yes. But I didn't think it would matter quite so much as it seems to now."

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose now I shall never be allowed to see you again."

"You only see me now by cheating."

"I was a fool, I suppose, not to wait and try to be properly introduced."

"Do you really know any one in England?"

"Lady Butler-Warren is my cousin. She's an American, you know. But she is in America."

"Elizabeth Warren! Oh, but how can I tell you are speaking the truth now?"

"I don't know how you can. But I am. I don't so much care what the others think. I dislike having you think I am a hopeless bounder."

"What possessed you to do this?"

"I dined," said Charles Edward, "at the Savoy last Wednesday, not so very far from your table."

If Lady Angela's subsequent conduct seems to any one to deviate from that lofty standard of ladylikeness to which her birth would seem to have destined her, or if Charles Edward's speeches, as here reported, seem inadequate to have soothed her anger, it must always be borne in mind that the two had already earlier in the dinner "got on very well."

"By-the-by, Mr. Austin," Lord Emscott launched at his host across the table.

"Here it comes," said Charles Edward beneath his breath.

Then Lady Angela cross the Rubicon.

"Isn't it extraordinary, father," she said, "that mother never told me about Mr. Austin's being Elizabeth Butler-Warren's cousin?"

"Perhaps not so strange," retorted Lord Emscott and as the conversation seemed to include the whole circumference of the table, every one stopped to listen. Charles Edward says his heart nearly stopped, too.

"When I first saw Mr. Austin to-night I couldn't make out." Lady Angela went on, "why his face was so extraordinarily familiar to me. But when he spoke of his cousin I remembered at once. She has a large photograph of him standing on a writing table in her boudoir. Elizabeth used to tell me about him often. But somehow I didn't realize that our Mr. Austin's and Elizabeth's were the same."

Lord Emscott felt solid ground beneath his feet once more. If one could not count on the untrustworthiness of Caroline's memory, on what could one count? Just then a waiter called upon him to choose between fine champagne, chartreuse and kummel dore, and, applying his mind to this problem, he forgot the other. Singer started afresh the discussion with Buxton on the advance of Russia toward India, and the dinner, reported afterward by every one to have been especially successful, passed on beautifully to its end.

"I can't tell you what you are," murmured the host to his left-hand neighbor. "At least not on so short an acquaintance."

"You see what you have made me. You must be Elizabeth's cousin now, if she has to adopt you."

"I swear I am. If I hadn't been, I wouldn't have let you do what you did."

Ultimately the story, in a sort of way, got out; there had been, of course, Mrs. Sackville and Hertwich to reckon with. But by that time Lady Butler-Warren had returned from New York, and her cousin was fairly well known to all of her friends, and very intimate at the Emscotts'. Indeed Helena Frampton, from the beginning, backed up Lord Emscott's view of his wife's memory. Helena had a sense of humor, and she had a letter from Angela written the morning after the famous dinner. In any case, in the thick of a London season even Sherlock Holmes would scarcely find time for really effective investigations. Not that they could in the end have done any great harm to any one. The Austin connection in New York is really satisfactory, and the money is indisputable. The story of that night remains merely to prove that even in the beginning the pair cared for each other enough to be willing to make sacrifices, even of the truth—so Charles Edward says.

Miss Hepsy's Company

By NINA PICTON

"MIS' HEPSY'S t' hev comp'ny f'r Christams," said Widow Greene to her next-door neighbor, who had just stepped in.

"How so?" asked Lucinda Grimes, in surprise.

"Jes' so," sneered the widow. "Can't seeh a thing be? Will you tell me ef any woman's goin' f' buy a hull turkey, a goose, a raft o' vegetables an' seeh like, t' feed her poor lone self? No, I tell you; an's she a-eatin' ev'ry day like a bird, peckin' at this an' that, as if 'twarn't good 'nough f'r her. I've been riled sometimes at th' likes o' her a-settin' herself above her kind, an' she a-ownin' less than you an' me. Why, th' only thing good 'nough mentionin' is that there blue chiny someun give her when she was a girl. An', laws alive! she sets 'nough store by it; it only sees th' daylight once or twict a year."

Miss Lucinda, for her own part ,liked Miss Sepsy. A good Christian woman, was her verdict, as she retrospected, remembering the care Miss Hepsy had taken of her when she was down with the "rheumatiz," and the careful supervision and fulfilment of the household duties.

"Maybe it's some o' her kin," suggest Miss Lucinda meekly, "one of 'em that's settin' down in th' dagerytype, with th' long black curls an' th' sweet face."

"They're all dead an' gone," sniffed the widow. "She told Jerushy Martinso, an' cried, too, when she told it. Mis' Hepsy's a lone woman, same's me, but 'twould 've ben better f'r her of she hadn't been. Some folks is worse when they've had trouble, an' gets as crusty as home-made pies."

"I like Mis' Hepsy," ventured little Miss Lucinda.

"Yer do? H—m! Well, I'm glad yer do; that's all I've got t' say 'bout it. H—m, you know no more 'bout the world than a sparrer, Lucindy, an' you a-pridin' yerself on knowin' so much 'rithmetic an' jography."

"That's got narthin' t' do with th' world, though."

"It ain't? I'd like t' know what jography is but knowledge o' the world." She cast a look of supreme pity at Lucinda.

"Well, I know 'nough t' have charity," spoke up Lucinda, now fairly wakened into defense of Miss Hepsy, "an' I'd cut my tongue out sooner 'n talk 'gainst my neighbor at Christmas time!"

"Yer would? Well, who's a-talkin'? I'm sayin' nuthin' 'ceptin' what's true. Mis' Hepsy never had no love f'r me, nor I f'r her. We stay t' hum, an' minds our own business."

Miss Lucinda looked skeptical as to the truth of the last assertion; she wondered if the widow knew what she was saying.

A cart was coming up the road. The pike was hard and frozen, and the wheels rattled noisily.

"That's Mis' Hepsy's cart now," said the widow, drawing the striped blue curtains a trifle back; "and the boy, Seth Crane, 's driving', an' there's two trunks in it, Lucindy; Some un's on the back seat, an' it's a man an' a girl, Lucindy." And the widow fairly trembled with excitement. "I must find out who 'tis," said she, pursing her lips with firmness, as if a lifetime depended on the knowledge.

"What! Be you a-goin'?" asked her hostess, as Lucinda drew her Scoth plaid shawl about her slender little figure, and tied the dark-green bonnet-strings more firmly under her chin.

"Yes, it's a gittin' late, an' I've t' git tea f'r mother." And with a stiff handshake and a hurried step, Lucinda Grimes passed out.

Down at Brookdale—Miss Hepsy's cottage—the guests were safely indoors—seated before the broad chimney-place, from which the crackle and glow of the pine logs sent forth a cheerful welcome. Miss Hepsy was resplendent in a blue gown and the pearl brooch and carrings that had laid away in the old morocco case for a twelvemonth. Her soft brown hair would not be smoothed down, but shared her excitement, and every minute or two came rebelliously out of place.

The tall man leaned against the mantel, and surveyed her with a look of pride. To him, she looked like the same girl that he had parted from years ago, and that he had been faithful to, in spite of fate and its determining influence. Every time he looked at her, Miss Hepsy's face beamed, and a color as modest as a girl's arose in her soft, white cheeks. Miss Hepsy was to celebrate Christmas very joyfully this year, and it was only three days off. Tressa—her only sister's child—had run down for a few days and was quite alive to the coming occasion.

Tressa Mayhew loved romances, as any girl of seventeen loves them. John Rawson had called for her, at Miss Hepsy's suggestion; for Miss Hepsy believed too firmly in him to think he would be captivated by the black curls and bright eyes of her niece.

"We'll have t' invite th' neighbors," said Miss Hepsy. "They'd never forgive me. There's Lucindy Grimes, a good little thing as ever lived, an' Jerushy Martin; an' th' Collinses, Parson Blair an' his folks, an'—an'—"

"Why do you hesitate? Are there so many more?" asked John Rawson, feeling a trifle timid in anticipation of the coming invasion by the neighbors.